



***The Houses of the Princesses Joanna,
Isabel, and Violant (1375–1392):
Formation, Composition, and
Characteristics of Minor Curial Areas***

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**The Houses of the Princesses Joanna, Isabel, and Violant (1375–1392):
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Stefano M. Cingolani

UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA-FBG

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to examine for the first time the formation, composition, and functioning of the houses of three unmarried princesses (*infantas*) of late fourteenth-century Spain; to consider the purposes of the houses and situate them within the complex galaxy of households belonging to kings and princes of the time; and, finally, to propose some subjects worthy of further investigation.

Keywords: Crown of Aragon; Ordinances; princesses' households

1. Introduction

In 1344, on the orders of King Peter III the Ceremonious, the first phase of the translation into Catalan of the *Leges Palatine* of King James II of Majorca was completed.² Between 1353 and 1355 the monarch copied the definitive manuscript of the *Ordinacions de la Casa i Cort* (Ordinations about the House and the Court), although he continued to provide modifications.³ With this normative

¹ This paper forms part of the project framework *Ioculator seu mimus. Performing Music and Poetry in Medieval Iberia* (European Research Council, No. 772762), at the Universitat de Barcelona.

² I use the correct, and historically informed, numbering for the kings of the Crown of Aragon, hence *Pere Terç*, the title King Peter himself used. Peter IV, the title more commonly used for him, reflects the numeration of the kingdom as opposed to the Crown of Aragon. See Jaume Riera, “La correcta numeració dels reis d’Aragó i comtes de Barcelona,” *Afers*, 69 (2011): 485–521, and Stefano M. Cingolani, “Ordenar, nombrar, numerar: cómo se organiza la historia y la memoria de una Corona,” *Jerónimo Zurita* (forthcoming).

³ Francisco M. Gimeno Blay, Daniel Gozalbo, Josep Trenchs, eds. *Ordinacions de la Casa i Cort de Pere el Cerimoniós*, Estudi introductori de Francisco M. Gimeno Blay (València: Publicacions de la Universitat de València, 2009), Francisco M. Gimeno Blay, *Escribir, reinar. La experiencia gráfico-textual de Pedro IV el Ceremonioso (1336-1387)* (Madrid: Abada Editores, 2006), Stefano M. Cingolani, “*Iocutores, ministreros,*

text, King Peter sought to organize in a harmonious and functioning way the numerous and articulated personnel providing service in a structure divided into four major partitions: the house, governed by the butler, and the chamber, by the chamberlain, in addition to the two large administrative apparatus formed by the chancellery, with the chancellor and the protonotary as the most important figures; and the complex system of economic management governed by the *mestre racional*. This was the staff that followed the king on his travels, and who were in direct contact with him. In the case of the chancellery and the *Mestre Racional*—an institution comparable to the exchequer (who had their headquarters and archives in the same Royal Palace in Barcelona)—the king was accompanied by at least the secretaries and the ration scribes. At the same time, the house and court also represented a great symbolic structure which was not exclusively physical, where the king, as chief and head, and his officers made up the different parts of the body—as Peter writes at the beginning of the text.⁴

It is for this reason that the king of Aragon did not include, in the set of personnel that formed the house and court the officials who administered the territory of the Crown, the intermediaries between the royal authority and the subjects, such as the governors, *veguers*, bailiffs, *merinos*, or *sobrejunteros*, to name a few. In turn, these individuals directed other personnel who were not part of the king's house and court.⁵

cantores en las Ordinacions de la Casa i Cort del rey Pedro el Ceremonioso. Espacios y momentos para música y poesía en el microcosmos curial,” *Medievalismo*, 31 (2021): 149–178.

⁴ “Et encara que varietat de officis en diverses persones distribuïda noblea alguna e bellea en lo regiment representa, cor bella e plaent és disposició de regiment quant les varietats dels officis són en atretantes persones distribuïdes a semblança de cors humà, en lo qual, per varietat de membres ha diverses officis deputats, resulta elegant bellea de tot lo cors” [“Although a variety of trade distributed in various persons some nobleness and beauty represents in the regiment, because beautiful and agreeable is a regimental layout when the varieties of the trades are in other people distributed so as a human body, in which, by variety of members, there are several deputed trades, it is elegant beauty of all the body”], Gimeno Blay, *Ordinacions*, 31. On this image, see M.^a Elisa Varela-Rodríguez and Núria Jornet Benito, “Las ideas del cuerpo y del buen gobierno en el “Prólogo” de las ‘Leges Palatinae,’” in *Utilidad y decoro. Zerimoniell und symbolische Kommunikation in den ‘Leges Palatinae’ König Jacobs III. von Mallorca (1337)*, ed. Gisela Drossbach and Gottfried Kerscher (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2013), 55–65.

⁵ In a sense contrary to the thought of King Peter, and thus to the organization of the Crown of Aragon, in studies of the houses of the kings of Castile, such officials, including the *adelantados*, the

The text's model character was so strong that the numerous updates or suppletive norms formulated over the years by both King Peter and his successors were never integrated into the text, but copied as an appendix in some of the manuscript testimonies of the *Ordinacions*.⁶ In fact, the practical application of royal regulations was not always possible or effective. This can be noted for some parts of the court's staff: although appearing in the treasury books, their functions are not exactly regulated in the *Ordinacions* in accordance with the importance of their role at court, as is the case with the minstrels and the singers of the royal chapel.⁷

Despite numerous studies on the text, its manuscript tradition, and the functioning of the king's house, what we know is, in essence, still relatively little.⁸ There are currently no studies linking the *Ordinacions* with previous partial regulations governing the courtesans' spaces; there is also a need to analyze how the previous organization of these curial spaces influences the final structure, as can be seen through documentation copied in the registries of the chancellery and, above all, in the books of the treasury.⁹ At the same time, the actual functioning of the model proposed by the *Ordinacions* has just begun to be studied, and the training and selection of courtly staff remains yet to be considered, in which staff could receive

admiral, and others, are considered to be part of the King's House. See for example Francisco de Paula Cañas Galvez, "La Casa de Juan I de Castilla: aspectos domésticos y ámbitos privados de la realeza castellana a finales del siglo xiv (ca. 1370-1390)," *En la España Medieval*, 34 (2011): 133–180.

⁶ See Olivetta Schena, *Le leggi palatine di Pietro IV d'Aragona* (Cagliari: CNR-Istituto sui rapporti italo-iberici, 1983).

⁷ Alexandra Beauchamp, "Ordonnances et réformes de l'Hôtel royal au début du règne de Pierre IV d'Aragon," *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 39/2 (2009): 555–573; Alexandra Beauchamp, "Les *Ordinacions* de la Casa i Cort de Pierre IV d'Aragon," in *Les entourages princiers à la fin du Moyen Âge. Une approche quantitative*, ed. Alexandra Beauchamp (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2013), 43–56; Alexandra Beauchamp, "La composition de la Casa i Cort du roi d'Aragon. Normes et pratiques au début du règne de Pierre le Cérémonieux," *Erasmus*, 1 (2014): 21–42; Alexandra Beauchamp and Jorge Sáiz Serrano, "En ració de cort," in *La sociedad cortesana en la Península Ibérica (siglos XIV-XV): fuentes para su estudio, Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez*, 46 [En ligne], 45–52 | 2015,

<http://journals.openedition.org/mcv/6489> [consulted el 15 de enero de 2021] and Cingolani, *I oculatores, ministreros, cantores*.

⁸ Schena *Le leggi palatine*, and the various studies by Alexandra Beauchamp quoted in the precedent footnote.

⁹ For example Diana Pelaz Flores, "Viajar y representar. La primera Casa de Leonor de Aragón (1367-1375)," in *Poblar la Casa, conectar los reinos. El entorno curial de la reina en la Península Ibérica (ss. XIII-XVI)*, ed. Diana Pelaz Flores, 21-23 de juny Santiago de Compostela.

essentially honorary posts, attributed to nobles, in keeping with a large number of individuals who received a salary.¹⁰ The links must be studied: the networks of fidelities that were established between monarchs, and the different social classes represented among courtiers—high and low nobility, citizen elites, and others—as well as the connections between these staff and other members of the same families who worked either in the chancellery or in the *Mestre Racional*. The presence of the staff in the service of the royal house according to the different territories that formed the Crown—the kingdoms of Aragon, Valencia, and Majorca, and the Principality of Catalonia—should be quantified and put into context before considering how this presence, certainly not always homogeneous over time, influenced the backbone of the territories.

Furthermore, the volume of documentation present for the funds of the chancellery and the *Mestre Racional*—which must be completed with documents from notarial protocols, which should be examined in order to achieve these goals—is such that completing a prosopography that affects thousands of people (and only then if we look at the reigns of Peter III and his sons John I and Martin I (1336–1410), without considering the change of dynasty that led to the arrival of courtiers of Castilian origin), is a task that exceeds the possibilities of a single scholar and would require years of investigation by a large team.

It should also be said that King Peter in the *Ordinacions* presents a model of a household and court befitting a man specifically. This model applied to both his house and to that of the heir, the infant John (although establishing when and to what extent requires further detailed study), as well as—possibly to a lesser degree—the other son, the infant Martin.¹¹ But under no circumstances, at least not globally, was this the case in the queens' houses or those of the infants' consorts, and especially not in their chambers, where the plentiful presence of women with different roles is visible, in stark contrast to their complete absence from the *Ordinacions*.

¹⁰ Beauchamp and Serrano, “En ració de cort.”

¹¹ Stefano M. Cingolani ed., *Pere III el Cerimoniós, Epistolari* (Barcelona: Barcino, 2019), doc. 203 (1 de març de 1372).

For the period taken into consideration in this study, 1375–1392, we can find, in addition to the house of the king—first of Peter the Ceremonious and then, from 1387, of John I—the houses of:

- The queen, first Sibil·la (1377–1387)—smaller, probably, than that of her predecessor, Eleonor of Sicily (1350–1375)—and then the house of Violant of Bar (1387–1396), who continued with a reduced house once dowager, as well as that of Mary, Queen of Sicily, for the period between 1384 and 1392.
- Until 1387, the infant John, Duke of Girona and heir to the throne, and of his wives, Mata of Armagnac and Violant of Bar.
- Until 1396, the infant Martin and his wife, Maria of Luna.

Throughout a brief season, we also find the house of the infant James (1382–1388), Dauphin of Girona, son of John and Violant, and for more time those of the three children that are the central object of this study:

- Joanna, Countess of Foix (1375–1407), daughter of the Dukes of Girona John and Mata of Armagnac.
- Isabel, Countess of Urgell (1377–1424), daughter of King Peter III and his fourth wife Sibil·la of Fortià.
- Violant, titular queen of Naples (1381–1442), daughter of Duke John and his second wife, Violant of Bar.

In 1392 Joanna married Mateo de Castellbò, Count of Foix, and Violant was promised to Louis of Anjou; these dates mark the end of the period examined.¹²

In the complex galaxy of houses revolving around, or existing in relation to, that of the king, the houses of these three *infantas*, the girls who were taken into consideration within this study until adolescence (Joanna at seventeen, Isabel at fifteen, and Violant at only eleven years of age), are perhaps minor planets or satellites that would move always in relation to the houses of their parents or the king. Furthermore, it seems to me that the *infantas* are a field of study within the scope of a specific investigation, because of the vast and at the same time relatively small amount of documentation to be analyzed, and that they may present topics of

¹² Until 1400 Violant did not make her marriage effective, and it was not until 1407 that Isabel married James of Urgell. Furthermore, extending the analysis so far would not have provided the information required to see the training and organization of the houses of the three *infantas*.

interest, especially when compared to other monarchies with more or less documentary wealth at the time.¹³ Finally, the *infantas* can provide useful data when examining the houses of their fathers or the king, especially regarding the relationships that existed within them in terms of personnel, organization, and economic structure.

2. The Houses

The documentation, though not always equally detailed, allows us to begin almost from the birth of the three children, and to understand how the staff who cared for them were organized and how their positions evolved until the formation of a well-structured house. Certain differences in time and form can be attributed to the different relationships the three children had with their mothers. In the case of Joanna, a maternal figure who could take care of her education and general maintenance was missing until the arrival of Violant of Bar in 1381, following the death of Joanna's mother Mata in 1378, when she was three years old. Another factor may be the level of importance attributed by parents to their daughters. This is especially evident in the case of Violant, who had a more settled and structured house at an earlier age, probably at the will of her parents, Dukes John and Violant, the heirs to the throne.

What we can see is the formation of minor courtesan spaces, where the main task, particularly over the first few years, was to preserve the welfare of the three girls. This is made evident by the continued presence of doctors, as well as the epistolary exchanges between Mata and Violant and those responsible for the houses, from whom the parents demanded constant information on the health and progress of their daughters. As the children grew older, another important element was the education of the three young *infantas* as princesses of the royal house, in order to prepare them for the roles they would perform once married. This is an aspect on which we do not have much surviving evidence, particularly with regards to the

¹³ If we have to judge from the bibliography, in Castille an investigation would be possible only starting from Isabel the Catholic's sons and daughters. See Ángela Muñoz Fernández, "La casa delle regine. Uno spazio politico nella Castiglia del Quattrocento," *Genesis. Rivista della Società Italiana delle Storiche*, 1/2 (2002): 71–95.

possible cultural training of the girls, who were required to be able to read and write. As early as the late thirteenth century, the documentation attests the presence of teachers of the infants and the books they were formed with, but in the case of girls, these three and other precedents, it does not provide any concrete information.¹⁴ One might think, in the face of the silence of the sources, that this minimal education in reading and writing was the responsibility of some of the women who was with them.¹⁵

Furthermore, the most important aspect of their training regarded their personal growth and education, in relation to the behaviour that was expected of them and the duties that awaited them. Though the documents do not always ascribe an exact role to each individual, this was probably the responsibility of the many female staff who surrounded the girls and who were older. Unfortunately, the little surviving correspondence emanating from the three girls provides very few means by which to assess this process of personal training.¹⁶

All of these elements allow us to draw curial spaces that are presented as more private and familiar, rather than political—although, as usually occurred with noble or wealthy families, even in very recent times, biological parents were not always a direct and constant physical presence. The management of the marriages and roles that each of the three children would have within the political pool of monarchy took place outside of their houses, and certainly without them being able to express any opinion on the matter.

¹⁴ See considerations in Stefano M. Cingolani, “La reina consort. El fugaç regnat de Margarida de Prades (1409-1410),” in *Margarida de Prades: regnat breu, vida intensa*, ed. Eduard Juncosa Bonet and Antoni Jordà Fernández (Tarragona: Ube-URV, 2022), 213–241.

¹⁵ See the case of Isabel Mendoza or d’Estefania Carròs i de Mur, although dating to a later period: María-Milagros Rivera Garretas, “Los testamentos de Juana de Mendoza, camarera mayor de Isabel la Católica, y de su maído el poeta Góme Manrique, corregidor de Toledo (1493 y 1490),” *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 37/1 (2007): 139–180, and Teresa Vinyoles-Mireia Comas, *Estefanía Carròs y de Mur (ca. 1455-1511)* (Madrid: Ediciones del Orto, 2005).

¹⁶ This is an issue that I have developed in “Las cartas de la infanta Juana, hija de Juan I y Mata de Armañac: cotidianidad y emotividad en la correspondencia de una adolescente de finales del siglo XIV,” in *Formules types, marqueurs expressifs et argumentation dans les lettres des femmes médiévales (Espagne, France, Italie, Portugal, VIIIe -XVe s.)*, ed. Patricia Rochvert-Zuili, 15-16 December 2022 (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, forthcoming).

As we will see more in detail, a factor marking the private character of the three houses, subordinate to the actions of parents or monarchs when they were not the progenitors, is the absence of a scrivener. Their communication through the writing of letters was only exercised on a return path with the parents, and through the butler or other individuals in charge of looking after the children.

Sometime before 20 August 1375, a couple of months after giving birth in Zaragoza, Duchess Mata was separated from her daughter Joanna, who was sent to Huesca, in northern Aragon, an area that may have had better hygiene conditions. She was accompanied by two of the maidens of her mother's house, Cília, wife of the late Matthew Mercer, who had been the waiter and admiral of King Peter III, and Albamunt of Pavia, wife of Peter Jubert (or Gilbert). There was also Ramoneta, who had been Mata's midwife, and Maria Gil de Ordás, the wet nurse, daughter of Juan de Ordás, the favored physician at the time. This group of four women and the baby, plus possibly a couple of waiters, also from her mother's house, required some men to take care of them: a buyer, a cook, a doorman, and a waiter.¹⁷

The early removal of Joanna from her mother—they would not see each other again until two years later, between late November and early December 1377—forced the need to build a small household: a reduced self-sufficient community of about ten people, who would take care of the child, apparently never moving from the area of Huesca. The link with the outside world, that is, Joanna's parents, consisted mainly of three men: the physician Juan de Ordás, the nobleman Lope de Gurrea, and the *infanzón* (a lesser nobleman) Arnaldo de Sellán, all of whom were Aragonese.

Duchess Mata wrote to them very often, and also to Albamunt, asking for information on the health of her daughter and her growth—many letters are occupied with the appearance of the first teeth¹⁸—and these were the three men who informed

¹⁷ For details, including the names relevant to the three houses, see. Stefano M. Cingolani, "Las Casas de las infantas no casadas: los casos de Juana, Violante e Isabel (1375-1392). Composición, movimientos de personal, entretenimientos," in *Poblar la Casa, conectar los reinos. El entorno curial de la reina en la Península Ibérica (ss. XIII-XVI)*, ed. Diana Pelaz Flores, 21-23 de juny Santiago de Compostela, forthcoming.

¹⁸ See Alexandra Beauchamp, "Trouver sa place dans la famille royale et vivre loin des siens. La correspondance féminine de Matha d'Armagnac, épouse de l'infant Jean d'Aragon (1373-1378)," in *Correspondencias entre mujeres en la Europa medieval* [en ligne] (Paris: e-Spania Books, 2020), <http://books.openedition.org/esb/2738>.

her. This indicates that Arnaldo and Juan de Ordás went to visit the household often and so were able to write about Joanna, as well as about the health conditions of Huesca, and in general of Aragon. It was through them that the Duchess attempted to organize the movements of her daughter and her household.

Sometimes, and despite the intense correspondence, Mata was not at ease with or entirely convinced by their reports of her daughter's health. There were also constant difficulties associated with moving the child, to the point that on 1 May 1376 Mata wrote to Lope de Gurrea: "dehim-vos que no creem que la dita infanta sie viva si'l dit senyor duch o nós no la vehem."¹⁹

The years 1378–1381, which saw the death of Duchess Mata and the arrival of Joanna's father's new wife, Violant of Bar, a unique document—which I will return to in due course when discussing the economic management of the houses of the *infantas*—informs us of the exact composition of the nineteen members staff and of its provisions and payments.

If we follow the division operated in the *Ordinacions* of King Peter's house and court, it can be seen that at this moment the child's environment was clearly structured in the chamber and house. Of the first are three of the four women already seen: Albamunt, Cília Mercera, and Maria Gil de Ordás, each with a waiter in her service; three maidens, one of whom was noble; one a *lavanera* (washer-woman); another with no clearly specified functions; one a waiter, Felipe de Ordás, husband of Maria Gil; and an assistant waiter.

The house included the cook, the *pastador* (bread-baker), the *ander* (who guided the litter), the mace keeper, the buyer, and another man with no specified functions, possibly the *atzempler* (muleteer). All staff were led by the butler—who we will later find was also referred to as a chamberlain, showing that he held both functions at the same time—Arnau Guillem Escrivà.

Apparently, the harmony and proper functioning of the house was not always absolute, especially because of the somewhat autonomous behaviour of the three

¹⁹ "We tell you that we do not believe that the said child is alive if the said duke or us cannot see her." All the documentation cited comes from the Archives of the Crown of Aragon, from two main sections: the Chancellery (C), and the Reial Patrimoni (Royal Heritage), in this case the sections of the *Mestre Racional* (MR) or the *Apèndix General* (AG); the cited document is C, reg. 1814, f. 58r.

women who had cared for the child since her birth, Albamunt, Cília, and Maria Gil, who in some cases did not respect the authority of the butler, provoking heated or outraged reactions from Duke John. Writing to Andreu Guillem on 12 October 1382, John said:

E cor hajam entès que aquexes dones, ço és saber, na Mercera, n'Albamunt et la ama novolen estar a vostre regiment, vos manam espressament que les digats que nós volem en tot cas que y estien axí com deuen, cor l'als fos mal feyt, et que en altra manera nós les gitaríem de casa e ls faríem dar comiat. E plau-nos que mostrets a le dites dones aquesta letra.²⁰

One surprising aspect of the typology of the staff in the *infanta's* service is the fact that, although a child, she already had a portable altar—yet no priest can be found within the accounts, nor among the staff of the houses of the other two *infantas*, Isabel and Violant.²¹ This situation can perhaps be explained by the fact that there was no fixed priest in her service, and that, according to the situation, he was one of Duke John's chaplains, who covered such a function without being recorded in the accounts of the dispenser and without any explicit instruction from her father.

Upon her arrival in the Crown lands, through surviving correspondence it is possible to see how Violant of Bar, the king's new wife, intended to take care of her stepdaughter and to serve as a mother. Though it is still difficult to determine exactly

²⁰ C, reg. 1666, f. 91r, "Since we have understood that those women, i.e. Mercera, Albamunt and the wet nurse, do not want to be in your regiment, we expressly send you to tell them that we want them in any case, as they should, because otherwise we would dismiss them and make them farewell; and we want that you show to the women this letter."

²¹ It is a papal privilege, as the infant John says to Andreu Guillem Escrivà on 14 March 1381: "Trametem-vos per lo dit Miquel una bulla del papa de licència a la dita infanta nostra filla que puxa haver altar portàtil et hoir missa ab tots sos domèstichs" ["We send to you by the said Miquel a papal bull with licence to the said infanta, our daughter, to have a portable altar and listen to Mass with all her household"] C, reg. 1663, f. 43r-v; see Alexandra Beauchamp, "La chapelle d'Eléonore de Sicile, reine d'Aragon de 1349 à 1375," in *La dame de cœur. Patronage et mécénat religieux des femmes de pouvoir dans l'Europe des XIVe-XVIIe siècles*, ed. Murielle Gaude-Ferragu and Cécile Vincent-Cassy (Rennes; PUR, 2016), 23–36.

when this transition took place, it is clear that following her arrival Joanna spent time with her stepmother, no longer living in complete isolation as before.²²

From about 1383 the documentation is abundant and regular, and it allows us to observe how the staff of the house and chamber of the *infanta* Joanna increased to twenty-five or thirty people, about whom we know the names, functions, and, in some cases, the kinship relationships between them, or with the members of other houses' staff or of the royal administration. The oscillation in numbers depends on some appearing irregularly, and others who seem to have been shared with the house of Joanna's stepmother, Duchess Violant. Among other factors to be highlighted are the continuity of some of these people over a few years, and the expansion of staff belonging to the same family.

The case of Isabel, however, is quite different, and here it is possible to appreciate what was discussed earlier on in this article: how close the baby was to her mother, and the times and forms of the formation of a house of her own. Isabel was born around 15 January 1377, and we know that, at least until 1379, Queen Sibil·la did not move from Barcelona, so the two were together in the early years of childhood. Although a detailed study of the queen's and her daughter's movements has not been undertaken, it can be said that until the death of her father, King Peter III, Isabel was not often separated from her mother.

This means that, of specific staff in the service of Isabel, during these early years we find in the records only the wet nurse, Catherine de Vilalta, as well as two deputies who could fill in at times when Catherine was not well. In 1378, after the birth of her brother Peter, who died shortly after, there was also a waiter, Francesc Saplana, in the service of the wet nurses, who stayed with Isabel until at least 1391. Because the queen never moved from the Minor Royal Palace, rooms were adapted to accommodate the infant and her wet nurse.²³

²² On epistolary forms of contact between the two of them, see Stefano M. Cingolani and Carles Vela, "Les cartes de la infanta Joanna de Perpinyà: nova proposta d'identificació i de datació," *Magnificat*, forthcoming. Violant very often writes *litteras de statu* to her French family and to the kings of Castile, reporting on her health and that of her husband; she does not always mention all of her sons, so when she references her two daughters, Joanna and Violant, they may be with her. There are also cases where the weaving of different houses at the same time and place leads one to believe that they were together.

²³ MR, reg. 506, f. 19v, 20v, i MR 507, f. 55v.

In fact, apart from a few people who already appear in the service of the nine-year-old Isabel in 1386, such as the butler Pere Guillem d'Estanybós, it is not until the following year that we find a house well-defined in its composition and structure. This is for a very specific reason: once King Peter had died, Queen Sibil·la, who the infants John (now king) and Martin had never accepted, was promptly marginalized and isolated from court life.²⁴ Upon Peter's death, the new King John was obliged take responsibility for his half-sister Isabel, who needed to be able to lead an autonomous life, separate from her mother and not directly dependent on the houses of the new monarchs, John and Violant.

Although Isabel's house maintains the same structure, it can be noted that it was smaller than that of her nieces, the *infantas* Joanna and Violant. The books of the treasury point to approximately fifteen people, among whom are different members of the same family, in addition to the wet nurse (and later nurse) Catherine de Vilalta, her husband Bernat, and her two daughters Constance and Catherine, who are listed as maidens.

The latter case, that of the *infanta* Violant (as the daughter of Duke John and his second wife, Violant of Bar, the heirs to the throne), presents several differences that allow an insight into how the management of daughters by the parents, and, consequently, of the staff who cared for them, did not always follow exactly the same pattern. With respect to Joanna, one difference was that her mother was still alive, and with stronger aspirations and personality than Mata had had. At the same time, Violant was not always with her mother, as Isabel was, though she was also not as far away as Joanna had been from Mata.

Violant was born in Barcelona on 11 August 1381. Just over a month later, the entire family set out on their journey to Tarragona. The infant did not travel with her parents, possibly because a slower pace of travel was required and to allow her to breastfeed, a role that was performed by Elisenda de Rosanes. In early December, Violant of Bar left Tarragona for Girona, but the infant Violant, possibly also for

²⁴ See Alberto Boscolo, *Sibilla di Fortià, regina d'Aragona* (Padova: CEDAM, 1970) [trad. Catalana Barcelona, Rafael Dalmau, 1971], and Núria Silleras-Fernández, "Money Isn't Everything: Concubinage, Class and the Rise and Fall of Sibil·la de Fortià, Queen of Aragon (1377–87)," in *Women, Wealth, and Power in Medieval Europe*, ed. Theresa Earenfight (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 67–88.

climatic reasons, remained in the city and the two separated, apparently until April 1382.

One surprising element is that, while the baby Joanna was raised in the mountainous climate of Huesca, cool in the summer and cold in the winter, the Duchess Violant chose for her daughter the mild and temperate climate of Tarragona, on the Mediterranean Sea.

The fact that only two books survive from the dispensary of Duchess Violant means we are unaware of the exact names of the staff who worked within it, especially over the first two years.²⁵ Furthermore, only a few people appear in letters written by the Duchess to ask for information regarding the health of her daughter.

As had been seen in the case of Joanna and Albamunt de Pavia, there was now a noblewoman of the confidence of Duchess Violante, Elisenda de Cervelló, who received these letters from the mother and provided information about the child's health. Elisenda was accompanied by a number of maidens who came from the house of Violant, about whom we do not know exactly their identity and number. As far as women's staff are concerned, we can count at least one wet nurse, waitress, and washer-woman; the correspondence also speaks of nurses, in the plural, and always anonymous. There is little indication of male staff, with one very significant exception: even before going to Tarragona, the *infanta* had a butler, Andreu Guillem Escrivà.

Escrivà's presence in this other house reveals a number of things. Firstly, it has already been seen that, in the case of Joanna, this figure did not appear until she was about three years old. And it makes sense that a small group of women who made up a self-governing house, as has been seen in precedence, needed a group of male staff at its service, especially in terms of cooking and relations with the outside world, such as buying food and other goods necessary for its maintenance. However, beyond this reasonable hypothesis, based on previous cases, the fact that there was a butler or steward to run the community would lead to the belief that this—even within a few days of the birth of the *infanta* Violant—was more numerous than the ten people, at most, who formed the house of the princess Joanna in the early years, which until 1378 did not have this role.

²⁵ MR, reg. 617, that covers from 1384 until April of 1385, and MR, reg. 618, from January-August 1386.

Secondly, it is clear that John and Violant selected an individual who already had some experience in the task, as he had been the steward of the house of the *infanta* Joanna the previous four years, at least between 1378 and 1381. Arnau Guillem remained in charge of the house of the *infanta* Violant from the end of 1381 until 1382, when he can again be found leading the house of Joanna. His successor was Joan Escrivà, probably a relative, though it is not possible to establish the degree of kinship with certainty. And it was Joan himself who was to take over, replacing Arnau Guillem within the house of the *infanta* Joanna in order to learn the office better, before returning to direct the house of the *infanta* Violant in 1383, until at least 1392.

The surviving documentation allows us to have a clearer picture of the roughly thirty staff members that formed the house of the *infanta* Violant. Of the three houses, hers was the most numerous and the most well-developed at an early stage. This is probably due to the fact that Violant was the daughter of the dukes, both of whom were alive and who had a great appreciation for the need to display their dignity and power.

3. Finance

One question that must be raised—though, at least for the time being, we cannot know all of the answers—is that of the finance of the three *infantas*' houses. In fact, what the relative documentation shows is mostly trends, which do not always seem to correspond to a fixed rule. In order to have more elements of appraisal, it would be necessary to deepen the study of previous houses of *infantas*, such as those of Constance and Joanna, daughters of Peter III and Maria of Navarre, and Eleanor, daughter of Peter himself and his third wife, Eleanor of Sicily, for which I still have fairly incomplete data.²⁶

As a general trend, the books of the dispensary of John, Mata, and Violant, as well as the treasury books of Queen Sibil·la of Fortià, show that the expenses of male sons were borne by fathers, while daughters depended on their mothers. There are also some successive modifications to this trend, because, at the time of Mata's death, the person who was to take charge of her daughter Joanna was John, duke and subsequently king, but not her stepmother Violant. In the case of Isabel, meanwhile,

²⁶ For Eleonor see Pelaz Flores, "Viajar y representar."

at the time of the death of King Peter and the isolation of her mother Sibil·la, it was again John, now king, who would bear the expenses of the house of his half-sister, while Violant's was always under the control of her mother.

The sources also show that there was no special allocation of income to cover the maintenance of the houses, but that they were instead directly under the control of the dispensary of the *infantas'* parents. However, for the early days of *infanta* Joanna we can see irregular specified payments from Mata, which alone could not always guarantee that the house would not sometimes encounter economic problems.²⁷

However, there is at least one known exception. AG, reg. 199 is an accountancy volume of the house of the *infanta* Joanna written between the years 1378-1381, between the death of her mother Mata and the arrival in the Crown of Aragon of her stepmother, Violant of Bar. Although the lack of the first folio does not allow us to know exactly how much money Duke John had earmarked for the maintenance of his daughter and her house, nor exactly on what specific income the allowances were made, it is clear that he had fixed sums. It would appear that the sum was 30,000 shillings, and that the butler Andreu Guillem Escrivà, at the end of the exercise, was required to recount the expenses to Perpignan Blan, the Duke's dispenser, and Guillem Oulomar, Violant's dispenser.²⁸

This small record covers a very specific time, for which Duke John tried to ensure the maintenance of his daughter's house without having to make timely payments, as had been the case before. Also, with the arrival of his new wife Violant, the salaries of Joanna's staff ceased to have this autonomy and were directly in the charge of her father's dispensary, with the same (ir)regularity as payments to other members of the Duke's own house.

²⁷ For example, for Joanna veg. C, reg. 1811, f. 15r-v, reg. 1814, f. 97r-v, f. 103r-v, f. 116v, f. 181r-v, f. 184r; reg. 1663, f. 43r-v; while, for Violant, it would appear to be more regulated funding, and directly dependent on the mother's dispensary. I have found only one case, reg. 1817, f. 99v.

²⁸ Account review was not done immediately, as shown by Alexandra Beauchamp, "Les comptes des *dispensers* de l'infant Jean d'Aragon (1351-1386) et leur contrôle par le *maestre racional*: des discours interposés," in *Les comptes et les choses. Discours et pratique comptables du XIII^e au XIV^e siècle en Occident (principautés, monarchies et mondes urbains)*, ed. Anne Lemonde (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes), 35-153.

The question is: how should the exception represented by this register be assessed, as the only one preserved or at least localised? Is this just an archival exception, or is it also an administrative one? Is it the only one that is preserved, or is it the only one that existed? In principle, all documentation generated by married infants' houses ends in the royal offices, where the records of the various administrations were archived, and where the records of dispensers were supervised. Likewise, the archival and cataloguing structure of the *Reial Patrimoni* (Royal Heritage) funds, to which the *Mestre Racional* belonged, was modern; moreover, much documentation has been lost, as shown in incomplete series. Perhaps, as a result, much of the documentation that does not fit into the current archival coordinates is catalogued in the *Apèndix General* fund, within the *Reial Patrimoni* section, where this register is preserved. Should we think that this accounting documentation for the minor houses was not reviewed by the *mestre racional*? What can be read at the beginning of the volume would show the opposite, i.e. that it should be reviewed, at least by the dispensers, and should therefore be kept in the *Mestre Racional* Archive. Or simply, because it is of less importance than the documentation generated by kings and queens, princes and princesses with dispensaries, have other volumes of the same type been lost? The case of other preceding *infantas* may help to formulate a hypothetical answer.

The documentary situation presented by the daughters of King Peter and Mary of Navarre, Constance, born in 1343, and Joanna, born in 1344, does not provide conclusive evidence. In Queen Mary's only disposable register of her Treasury (MR, reg. 456), ranging from January to June 1345, expenses are recorded for a restricted number of people serving both *infantas*, including a minstrel, Pere Vescomte. If King Peter, after the death of Queen Mary on 29 April 1347, had followed the same criterion that his son would follow, we should find in his books the expenses of the house of the two *infantas*—one might believe that, being two girls only a year apart from each other, they would share the same. But in the king's records of the following years, at least until 1354, no expenditure is made for the maintenance of the staff of this house; furthermore, the minstrel Pere Vescomte disappears from the royal accounts. The fact that he was no longer in the service of the *infantas* would contrast with the situation of their brother, the infant John, who had had musicians in his service since he was

less than a year old and would continue to have throughout all his childhood and adolescence. At the same time, the infant John would have had the dispensary since 1351, having been born in late 1350. The fact that he was the heir to the throne, the much-desired male son, and considering the king's attention to forms and ceremonials, can easily explain that, from the very beginning, records exist and that they have been preserved—while the first series of records of chancellery did not begin until 1361.

The expenses generated by the house of the two *infantas* were recorded in some way, as they do not appear directly in charge of the royal treasury. In addition to the example of Joanna, this possibility would be confirmed by the fact that, at the time that Constance sailed to Sicily to marry King Frederick IV, the expenses of the journey were borne by the monarch and recorded at MR, reg. 479. Among the paid staff, we located some minstrels of the house of the *infanta* who had never appeared in the king's records. Therefore, it is more than reasonable to believe that the two princesses should have their own administration and that it should not have been retained.

In order to know how the house of the two *infantas*' economic management worked, and, above all, if there was an allocation of own funds and of which entity, research should be deepened into the documentation of an economic nature, either the chancellery records of the *Peccunie* series, or other volumes of the *Reial Patrimoni*—although these sources do not always present sufficiently continuous series.

4. Correspondence

Finally, and as has already been said, it is a question of assessing how these reduced curial spaces should be interpreted: as human groups dedicated to the care and education of the *infantas*, or as spaces that can also be regarded as political.²⁹ The relationship of the *infantas* with writing and communication is an element of study that can be decisive for drawing some conclusions.

In my opinion, in order to see a curial space also as a political one, it must have access to the outside so that it can relate to other people. To do this through writing, the houses in question should have minimum structures, we could say, as a chancellery: at least one secretary, one scribe, possibly someone who prepared wax to

²⁹ For Castile at the time of Queen Isabel the Catholic, see Muñoz Fernández, “La casa delle regine.”

seal the correspondence, and another—who may be the same scribe—who copied it into a register, if it existed; or who, in any case, managed its conservation, before it was deposited in the Royal Archives, located in the Royal Palace of Barcelona since 1318, and which constitute the central core of the current Archive of the Crown of Aragon. Copying in a register was a fundamental aspect of the documentary procedure (if one wishes to attribute importance to correspondence) because it is only through these copies that it is possible to retrospectively check what has been said and to whom.³⁰ But there is no trace of all this in relation to the houses of the three *infantas* studied here, in contrast to the evidence we have found for other male infants, or their wives, since the time of James II.

The infants James and Alfonso, the sons of James II, like the infants John and Martin, half a century later, had their chancellery. This was so, either because they were the heirs to the throne, and because they being general procurators of their father, such as the case of the infant James, first, and, after his resignation of the throne of his brother in 1319, of Alfonso; and later of the infant John; or because he had been assigned a broad heritage to administer, as well as having public responsibilities, as was the case of the infant Alfonso, before becoming heir to the throne, and of the infant Martin.

At the same time, their respective wives, Teresa d'Entença of Alfonso, Mata of Armagnac, and Violant of Bar of John, or Maria de Luna of Martin, administered their heritage and incomes, also performing some political functions, albeit limited and to be assessed on a case-by-case basis.³¹ For these reasons they also had their own chancellery and dispensary.

Unlike these male infants and their wives, the princesses who are the subject of this study did not have their own economic management apparatus, nor, perhaps more importantly, a scrivener office. This was, I believe, not only for reasons of age. Their communication through writing is only exercised, in a roundabout way, with their parents and through the butler or the other people in charge of caring for the

³⁰ This aspect has been studied as an instrument of power. See Gimeno, *Escribir, reinar*, but it is also significant in more personal situations or those not strictly related to the Crown government.

³¹ See Stefano M. Cingolani, “Diplomacia íntima: como mantener la paz en tiempo de paz,” in *Diplomacia y cultura política en la Península Ibérica (sigos XI al XV)*, ed. José Manuel Nieto Soria and Óscar Villaroel González (Madrid: Silex, 2021), 83–108.

children, who apparently took charge of composing and writing the letters. No professional scribe is detected among the staff of their houses.

In fact, no records of any of the three *infantas* are preserved, nor are the letters that they may have sent to them in the records of their parents. It is true that, with very few exceptions, only the letters issued were copied into the chancellery records, and not the letters received. These, in general, are archived in the different series of the Royal Letters fund, where—with the exception of the James II series which has about 20,000 letters—the conservation of correspondence in entry is occasional and anything but complete.³²

This is evident, for example, because none of the letters that John, Mata, or Violant received from those responsible for their daughters are preserved, yet because part of their correspondence with them is in response to letters received, we know that they existed. Obviously, if any letter had come out of one of these houses addressed to someone who was not part of the royal family, it would be even more difficult, if not impossible, to know, precisely because of the lack of records and the different criteria for maintaining correspondence. However, if we consider the age of the three *infantas*—seventeen, fifteen, and eleven—at the time of the closure of the investigation in 1392, the only one that by age could have written some would be princess Joanna.³³

It is true that we have almost fictitious correspondence between parents and children. On 30 March 1351, for example, King Peter III responded to a letter allegedly sent to him by the infant John, then a three-month-old baby:

Lo rey d’Aragó.

Molt car fill, vostra letra havem reebuda, per la qual, supplican a nós que'l nostre bon estament vos deguéssem notificar, nos havets fet saber la bona disposició de la vostra persona. La qual letra ab plaer de cor reebuda et aquella bé entesa, vos

³² With the considerations formulated by Alexandra Beauchamp, “La conservación de las cartas de las reina de Aragón al siglo XIV,” in *Cartas de mujeres en la Europa medieval. España, Francia, Italia, Portugal (siglos XI-XV)*, ed. Jean-Pierre Jardin, José Manuel Nieto Soria, Patricia Rochwert-Zuili, Hélène Thieulin-Pardo. (Madrid: La Ergástula), 69–87.

³³ In fact, and beyond these limits, Infanta Isabel send a *littera de statu* to her half brother, King John, on 10 February 1393 (C, Cartes Reials Joan I, caixa 6, carta 698).

responem que, gràcies a nostre senyor Déus, som sans et alegres, et havem gran plaer de saber vostra bona sanitat, la qual volem e us pregam que ns façats saber con pus sovín pugats, car d'açò reebrem gran plaer.³⁴

Fiction, given the age of the infant, can be explained either by the extreme formalism of King Peter, who bore the nickname Ceremonious, or by the special significance of the long-desired male heir. However, through the answers received, we know that this type of letter also existed between the Duchess Violant, her stepdaughter Joanna, and her daughter Violant.³⁵

In fact, so far there are only two surviving letters from the *infanta* Joanna to Queen Violant, which can be dated 24 and 25 May 1390. That only these two are preserved, apart from chance, is attributable to the somewhat unusual character that makes them unique documents. And it is precisely the details they contain relative to the practice of writing and sending correspondence that make them particularly significant for this purpose.³⁶

Joanna had remained in Perpignan, having separated from the queen a few days earlier. In the first letter, the *infanta* informs Violant of what had happened in the course of her visit to the church of Santa Maria la Real in Perpignan and recounts how the journey to the Volon, at the foot of the Pyrenees, had progressed. The queen was to have received the letter on the same day, 24 May, or early the next day, a Wednesday morning, as she was in Arles-les-Bains, a few kilometres from there.

Some of the things that Queen Violant wrote are revealed by the response that Joanna sent her on 25 May from La Jonquera, on the outskirts of Catalonia:

Senyora molt alta, mare et senyora mia molt cara, en I^a letra que vostra senyoria ha tramesa a'n Pau, é vist que vós, senyora, manats que les letres que yo us

³⁴ Cingolani, Pere III el Cerimoniós, *Epistolari*, doc. 35; "The King of Aragon. Very dear son, your letter we've received, by which you begged to be notified of our good station, you have made known your person's good health. Which we have received with heartfelt pleasure, and that well understood, we respond that, thank our Lord God, we are healthy and happy, and we have great pleasure in knowing your good health, which we want and ask you to be informed as often as you can, because of that we will receive great pleasure."

³⁵ See Cingolani and Vela, "Les cartes de la infanta Joana."

³⁶ New edition and study in Cingolani and Vela, "Les cartes de la infanta Joana."

tramet sien signades de ma mà et segelades ab mon segell, et per ço, senyora, aquesta és signada de la mia mà, encare que als cuns dien que aytal letra faç com vós. Contes del segell, senyora, no ho é pugut fer, car no avia gens de cera ne'n podia aver. Però, yo n' é feta en lo camí del Partús tro açí I^a pocha, mas és tan moll que entrò que en Bernat Metge la hage temprada, qui sab com fa a fer, no se'n poria segelar, et per ço si vostra mercè al present me n' aurets per excusada.³⁷

First, it should be noted that the queen continues to address the head of the house, as she did when the girl was a child, and not Joanna directly. At that time, it was Francesc of Pau, Violant's butler, who was to act as replacement for Arnau Guillem Escrivà. If Queen Violant reproached her stepdaughter that she must sign and seal her letters, it is because, of course, she was not used to doing so.

This anecdote perfectly illustrates how no one near her was equipped to seal, possibly with her ring, Joanna's letters. In fact, until then the correspondence with queen Violant had been in charge of the butler Arnau Guillem Escrivà, while in this case it was Francesc de Pau who possibly copied the letter and added his validation "Pau" at the foot of the text. In other words, in no case was a professional scrivener present alongside the *infanta* with the ability and instruments of his office, so presumably the queen's secretary and writer, Bernat Metge, intervened. His fleeting presence at the side of the girl and the rush to answer would explain why Joanna was unable to seal the letter. The preparation of wax was neither easy nor quick, and Bernat Metge, who had most likely brought him the stepmother's letter, would have needed to show her how it was done, although they failed to make the wax thick enough at that moment to send the missive. For this reason, the child was excused for being unable to add the seal (which is not actually present on the back of the letter), but only the autograph signature.

³⁷ "Very high lady, mother and my dear lady, in a letter that your lordship has sent to Pau, I have seen that you, my lady, command that the letters that I submit to you must be signed from my hand and sealed with my seal, and so, my lady, this is signed from my hand, although some say that I do the letters like you. As for the stamp, madam, I couldn't have done it, because there was no wax nor could have been. But, I did it on the road from Pertús to here a little, but it is so wet that until Bernat Metge has taken it, who knows how it is done, it cannot be sealed, and so if is your mercy have me forgiven."

It was by the end of 1336, and not by 1345 as is usually claimed, that the young King Peter the Ceremonious began to put his signature at the end of the documents he personally validated, inaugurating a new practice in the chancellery. The first should have been added on 12 October 1336, when the monarch was seventeen years old, a few months after becoming king, as his father, Alfonso III the Benign, had died on 24 January.³⁸ That this is the exact date, represented by the novelty in the validation of the documents by the king's autograph signature, is signified by the fact that the following annotation is present in the register: "Predicta litera fuit signata per dominum regem manu propria tali signus: Rex P."⁹ If it had been common practice among his predecessors—found neither in the documentation of the grandfather, James II, nor that of his father Alfonso III— or even his previous reigning months, such notation would not have been necessary.

Although it is unclear as to whether there was a fixed age to begin putting the actual autograph signature to validate an issued document, and may have been dependent on official responsibilities, it does make sense for Queen Violant to have suggested that a girl should be fifteen years old to fulfil the ceremonial validation of the contents of her letters by putting her autograph, as a sign of maturity and responsibility, despite being a private correspondence.

Judging from the limited evidence that has survived, and which we know of only indirectly, the letters of the princess Joanna (and, by extension, we have cause to believe that the same would have applied to Isabel and Violant) are quite intimate in character, directed to her mother or guardian and mediated by the head of the household. The princess lacked the necessary staff to carry out the minimum tasks required to present a communication that could be interpreted as public. All this reinforces the idea that these households were essentially private court spaces.

5. Conclusions

What I have proposed in this study is an initial approach to the theme of the houses of unmarried *infantas*, i.e., girls and adolescents of the royal family. This exploration still needs to be deepened, either by extending the investigation into the funds of the Archive of the Crown of Aragon, especially in the cases of other precedent *infantas*, or

³⁸C, reg. 1295, f. 136r.

by comparing these cases with those from other monarchies or princely states, such as the northern Italians, though it will not always be possible to carry out comparative analyses—both because of the possible chronological *décalage*, and because of the diversity, both in quality and quantity, of the available information. I also hope that the study of this specific case concerning the Crown of Aragon may be useful precisely in order to make comparisons or suggest possibilities at the time of integrating partial or scarce documentation.

Despite the provisional range of the results, and the non-absolute homogeneity of the documentation, it seems to me that the constitution and composition of these houses since the birth of the children, with the differences observed on a case-by-case basis, has been sufficiently well demonstrated, as well as the private nature of these minor extensions to the complex cosmos of the royal houses present in contemporaneity in the Crown of Aragon. Further research into their economic organization will offer up new findings that will make it possible to both understand better and possibly to modify and enrich the reflections presented here, as well as continuing to assess, through comparative analysis, the role of writing in the day-to-day and characteristics of the houses themselves.

Finally, a more accurate understanding of the functioning of the houses of the *infantas'* parents, whether when infants or when monarchs, will make it possible to understand better—and I am sure that it will be helped by in turn—the complex and always interlinked reality of the houses between them, and the general, especially economic, but also human, functioning of the staff involved. How the education of the three young women operated as princesses of the royal family should also be investigated—and indeed, this would correspond to a future study—examining not only their penmanship and readership capabilities, but also the necessary preparation to fulfil the roles they would play, once married, in the relations of the monarchy with other royal or noble families.